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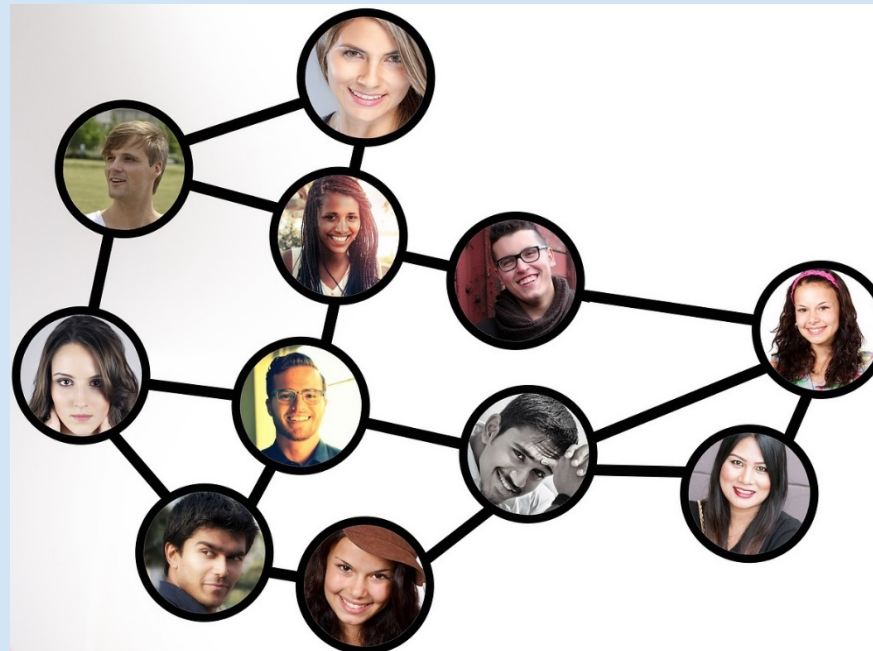
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Assessing online group work

ALT-C 2016



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Background and aims

- Importance of online group work:
 - Develop teamwork skills
 - Learning with others
- The challenges:
 - For students
 - For educators
- Context:
 - Distance, part-time learning at the UK Open University
 - Group project in the module: *Communication and information technologies*
- Aims of the research:
 - Investigate the challenge of implementing an online group project
 - Gain perspectives of students and tutors
 - Design group projects which are engaging to students and fairly assessed

Today's presentation

- Introduction to the online group project:
 - Website development
 - Work in a wiki
 - How the project work is marked
- Research methods
- Findings
 - From students
 - From tutors
- Framework for assessing online group projects
 - Individual marks versus group marks
 - Product versus process

The module:
*Communication and
Information technologies*

Key facts:

- 9-month part-time study
- Integrates a wide range of technical topics with generic skills development
- 60 credits at level 2
- 400-600 students per presentation
- The assignment for one of the five study blocks is a group project
- Students work in groups of 6-8 for the project

Block 3: *Creating & collaborating*

Online collaboration technologies and approaches

Large element of group work in the assessment

Creating a group website (40%)

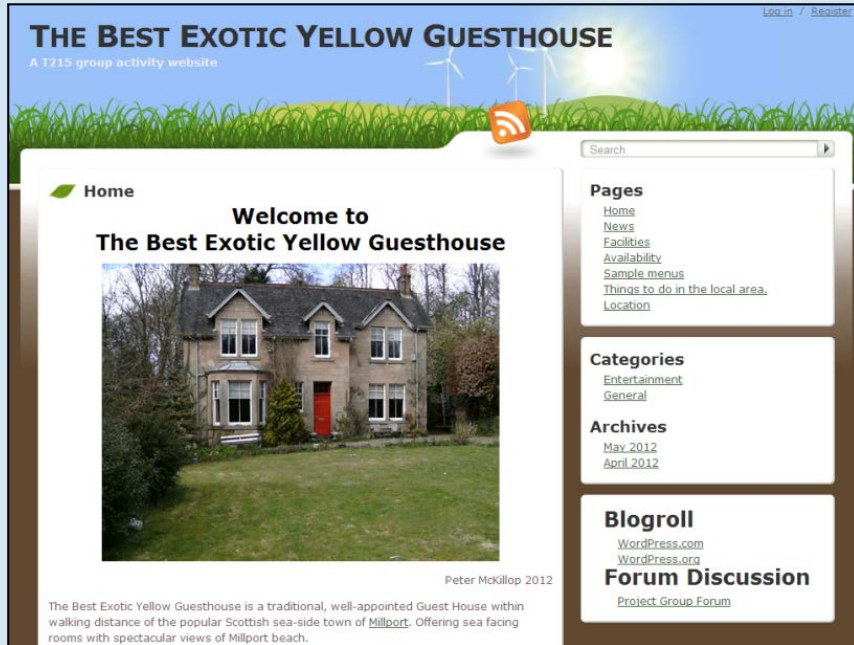
*[Focus of the research
presented here]*

Collaborative working in a wiki (50%)

*[Previous research – some results
included here]*

Reporting and reflecting on the
collaboration (10%)

Creating a group website



WordPress for the website:

- Groups develop a website for a given scenario & client e.g. a holiday company, a walking club
- They use WordPress, forums, wiki, web conferencing (optional)

Marks allocated for:

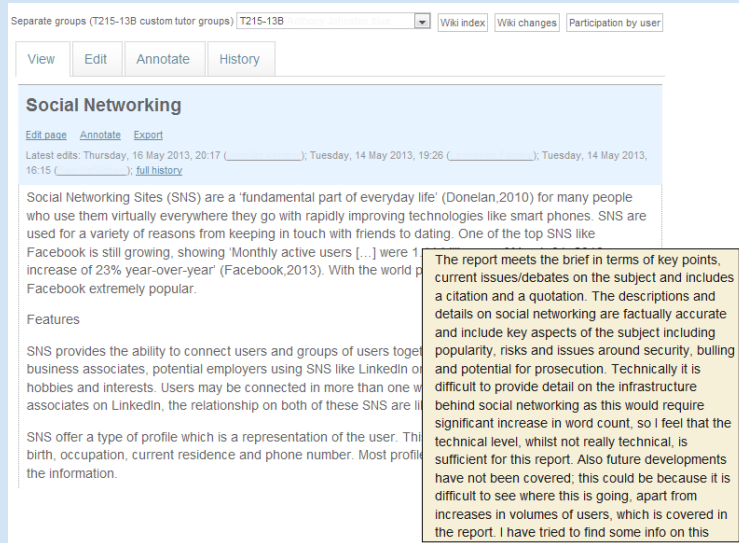
- product (the website); and process (collaboration)
- group as a whole; and individual contributions

Marked by viewing:

- the website and WordPress dashboard
- discussions in the forum
- documented decisions in the wiki

	Marks for product (website)	Marks for process (collaboration)
Individual marks	30%	30%
Group marks	20%	20%

Collaborative working in a wiki



Wikis for peer feedback:

- Each student writes a wiki page about an aspect of online communication and collaboration
- Each students gives/receives feedback to/from two group members; then improves their own page
- They use wiki, forums, web conferencing (optional)

Marks allocated for:

- product (wiki page); and process (giving/receiving feedback)
- group as a whole; and individual contributions

Marked by viewing:

- wiki page and feedback (copied into assignment)
- wiki history
- discussions in the forum
- documented decisions in the wiki

	Marks for product (wiki page)	Marks for process (peer feedback)
Individual marks	60%	30%
Group marks	0%	10%

Research methods

- Undertaken as two separate projects:

Website research:

Student data (qualitative):

- 27 students via six online focus groups
- Open ended questions to explore students' experiences:
- e.g. Did they find it rewarding? What were the frustrations? How did they feel about the assessment?
- Focus group data transcribed and coded.
- Emergent themes identified.

Tutor data (qualitative):

- 10 tutors in online discussion forums
- Open ended questions to explore tutors' experiences and views
- Coded using themes already identified.

Forms the basis of the following findings.

Wiki research:

Student data (qualitative and quantitative)

- 74 students via an online survey
- Closed questions with open comment boxes
- e.g. did the wiki provide all the features needed? Did group members contribute equally?
- Quantitative data analysed; qualitative data coded and analysed.

Tutor data (qualitative):

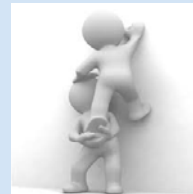
- 21 tutors in online discussion forums
- Open ended questions to explore tutors' experiences and views
- Coded and analysed.

Results previously published – fed into following findings where appropriate.

Research on the website collaboration

Three key elements were considered for the website research:

- *The collaboration*
 - how students interact and work together
- *The task*
 - what students are required to do/produce
- *The assessment*
 - how students' work is graded





Emergent Themes

PARTICIPATION

Absent Active (core)
Peripheral

FAIRNESS

Division of work
Marks

FEELINGS

Motivation Frustration
Reward Challenge
Enjoyment

SKILLS/ABILITIES

Technical
Organisational
Experience

RELATIONSHIPS

Friendliness Dominating
Personalities Getting on
Helping Social presence
Group dynamics
Working with strangers

TIMING

Asynchronous
Holiday Domestic
Jobs

TASK

Authenticity
Product (quality)
Brief (instructions)

ORGANISATION

Deadlines Leadership
Decision making
Division of work Timings
Meetings

TUTORS

Tutor strategies – supporting students
Tutor strategies – marking

TOOLS

Forums OULive
WordPress
Wiki

Main findings - *The collaboration*



Students

- For the majority, the group project was an enjoyable experience.
- The collaboration was the most challenging element of the project, but also the most rewarding.
- Some, but not all groups had leaders.
- Collaboration was a cause of anxiety for some students.
- Evidence of cooperation rather than collaboration.

Tutors

- Agreed that the majority of students enjoyed the group work.
- Agreed that the collaboration, rather than the task, was the biggest challenge for students but also the most rewarding aspect.
- Felt that in most groups an 'unofficial' leader emerged.
- Tutors' own challenges were mainly related to assessing the collaboration.

Main findings - *The task*



Students

- Most students were proud of their final product and would like to showcase it.
- The tools (both wiki and website) were fairly intuitive and easy to use.
- More technically experienced students were frustrated with the task – the limitations of the tools.
- More technically experienced students felt the task was not 'authentic' enough, and wanted to include other content (e.g. twitter feeds).

Tutors

- Agreed that the students were proud of what they achieved.
- Agreed that more technically experienced students complained about the task.
- Felt that the task was authentic.
- Said that less technically experienced students learnt new skills, but often let others do the work.

Main findings - *The assessment*

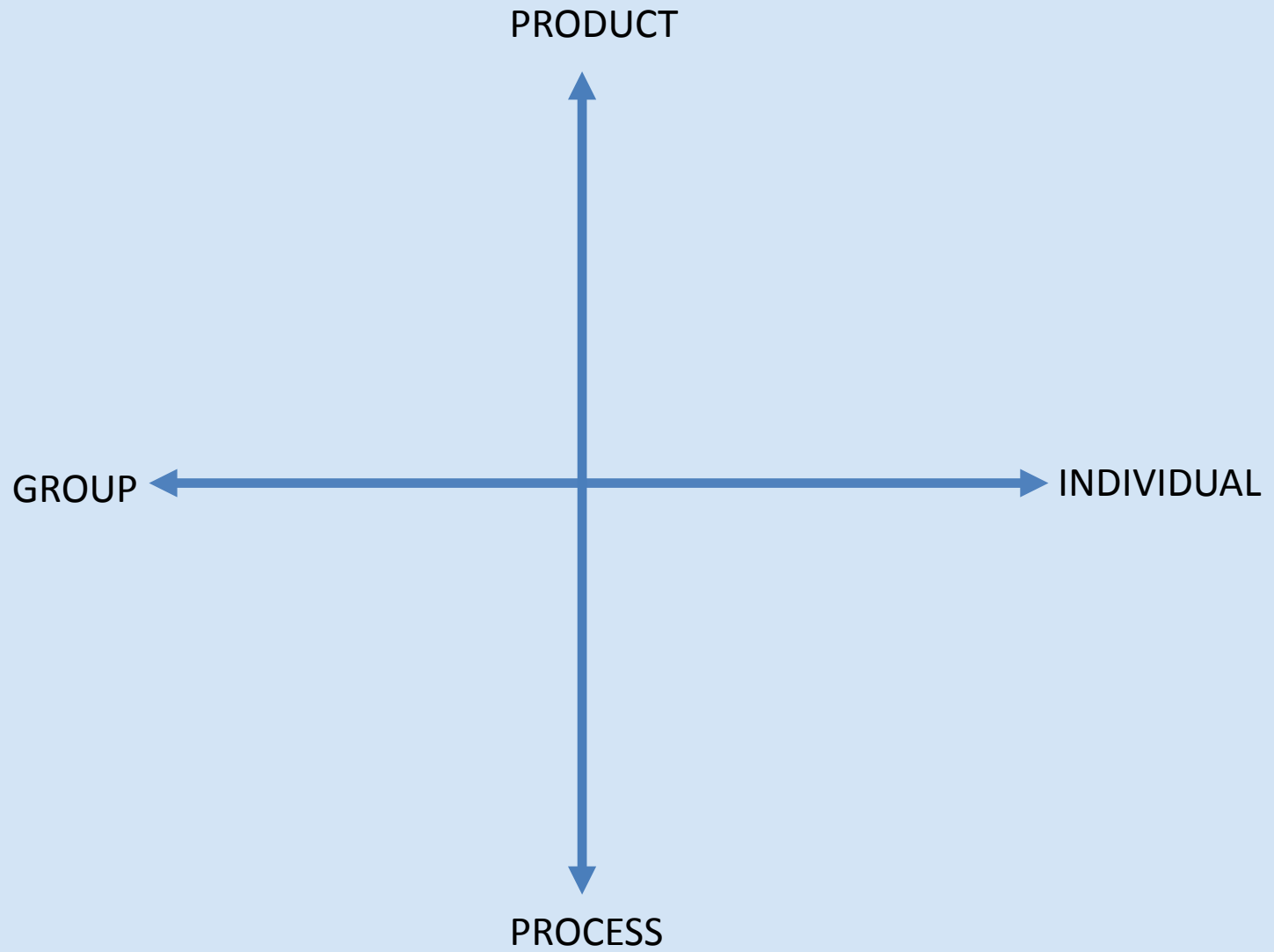


Students

- Even balance of opinions on whether work was divided fairly in groups.
- Some students felt they were 'carrying' others.
- Even balance of opinions on whether the group marks were fair.
- Felt individual input was recognised, but would have liked to know what marks others in their group were awarded.
- Some students were worried/anxious about group marks.

Tutors

- Felt that work was not divided fairly in groups.
- Agreed that some students 'carry' others.
- Did not like allocating group marks, despite the bias towards individual marks.
- Found marking group work time consuming and difficult.
- Marking strategies involved keeping on top of forum postings, and making notes on group dynamics.



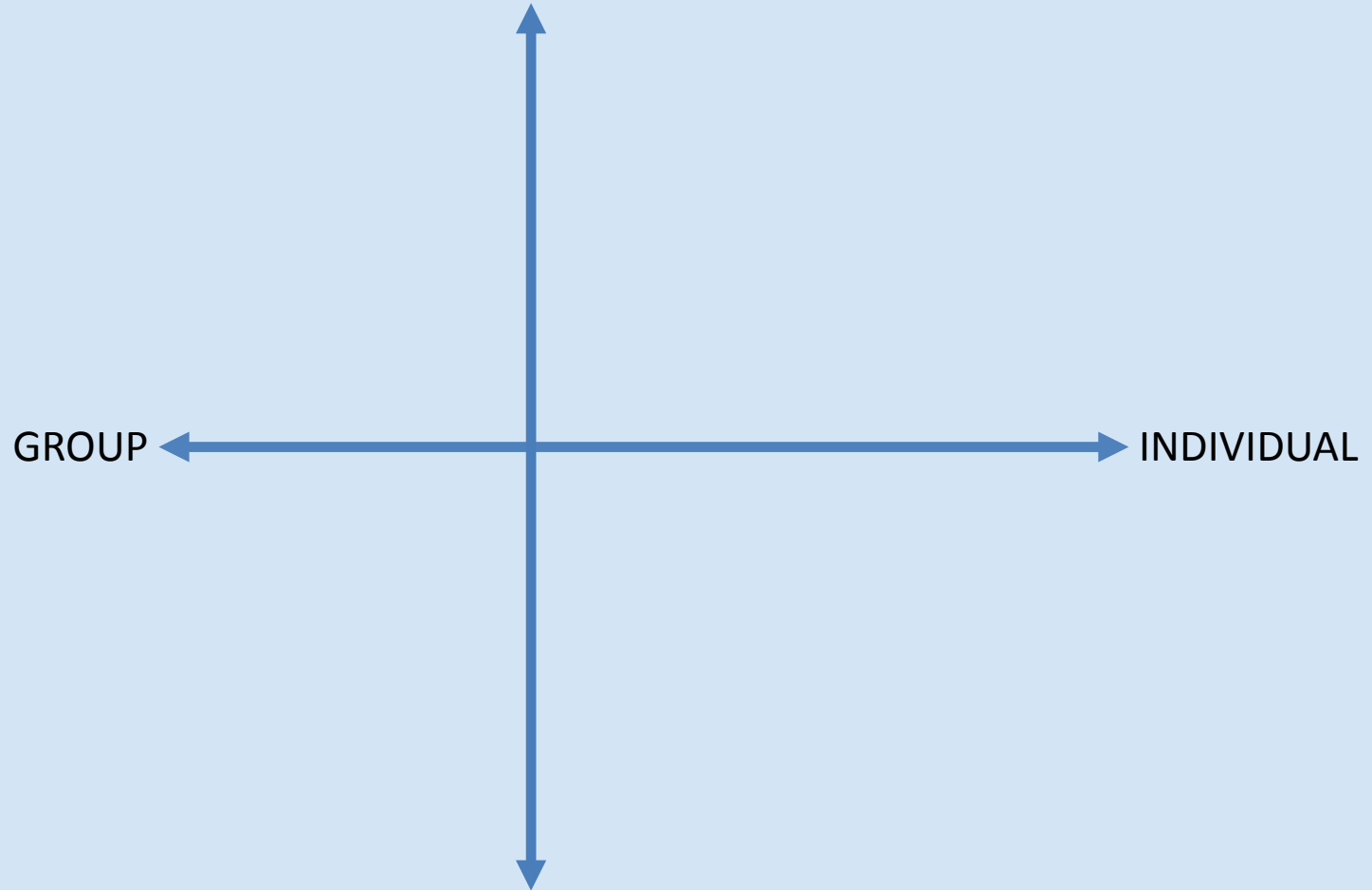
Website
question

PRODUCT

GROUP

INDIVIDUAL

PROCESS



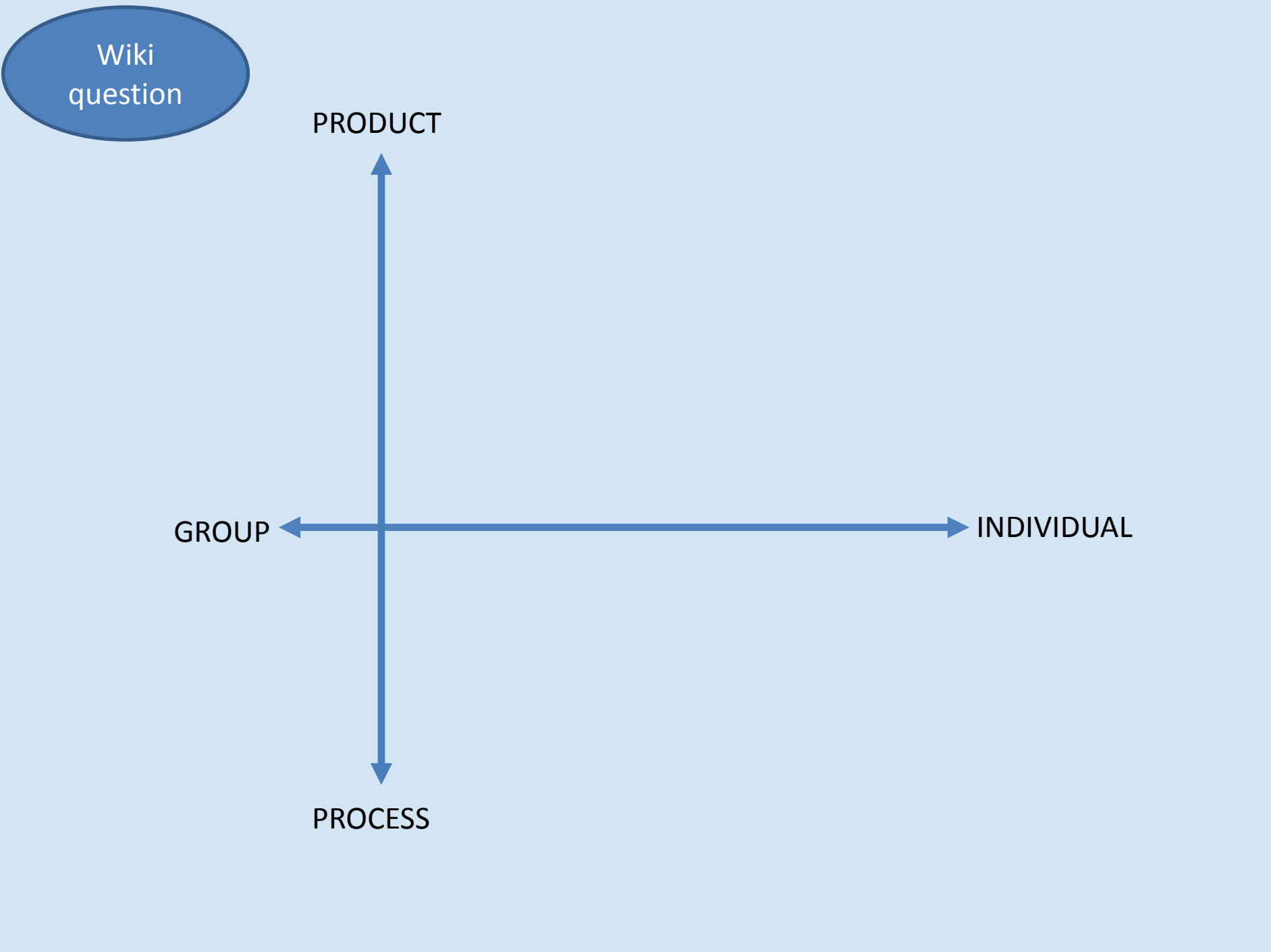
Wiki
question

PRODUCT

GROUP

INDIVIDUAL

PROCESS



PRODUCT

- How important are the technical (vs. group working) skills?
- Opportunity to showcase products.
- Relatively easy to mark.
- Tutors unhappy about awarding group marks (for product).

- How to challenge ALL students?
- Freedom to undertake more complex technical tasks – more authentic?
- Can be relatively easy to mark.
- Difficult to differentiate between students at both ends of the scale.

GROUP

INDIVIDUAL

- Assigning a group leader - more authentic? How would this affect marking?
- Time consuming for tutors to mark.
- Monitoring group dynamics.
- Tutors unhappy about awarding group marks (for process).

- How to support students who struggle and how to reduce anxiety?
- Time consuming for tutors to mark.
- How to effectively monitor an individual's input and mark accurately?

PROCESS

Thank you

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